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ABSTRACT

This essay is a call for effective planning in postsecondary education. The thesis is that unless we know why to plan we cannot plan effectively. Emphasis is on some fundamental aspects of planning: the need for courage, for purpose and choice in decision, and for direction and leadership. A definitional inquiry into planning is presented along with reasons for not planning. The variety of problems confronting American higher education today are shown to be similar to those facing institutions in the mid-nineteenth century. The costs of not planning are high, especially during times of retrenchment. It is concluded that the major failure in many planning endeavors is a reluctance to make hard choices or at least choose priorities. (Author/LBH)

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PLANNING IN ACADEME:

COURAGE, PURPOSE AND CHOICE

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
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Introduction

This essay is a call for effective planning in postsecondary education. My thesis is that we know a great deal about how to plan, but we cannot plan effectively unless we know why we plan. We need, in short, people with the courage and vision to decide what is worth doing, state their purpose and set about accomplishing it. Leadership in postsecondary education is not only notably lacking, the "system" mitigates against it.

These remarks do not constitute an exhaustively researched treatise on the availability and applicability of various planning models. It is not an apology for cost benefit analysis, different budgeting schemes, market research, PPBS, enrollment projection formulae, MBO, computer planning models, crystal balls or any other method of planning so prevalent in the literature of higher education. It is not a review of all the statements--profound and profane--made recently about planning, systems theory, forecasting, trends, projections, models, data inputs and the like. Rather, it is an attempt to focus on some rather simple but fundamental aspects of planning. These are the need for courage, purpose and choice in decision, direction and leadership.

PLANNING--A DEFINITIONAL INQUIRY

Planning is an effort to impose a particular perspective and design upon the amorphous reality of the future. It is an expression of intent, an effort to impress our vision upon reality. It is not merely a wish list, a potpourri of preferences that are desirable. Rather, it is a set of coherently related decisions about a goal and how to achieve it. Plans may have mutliple goals, but each must be internally consistent and mu-

tually reinforcing. Planning also deals with the specification of alternatives in the future. As such, it deals not with the realm of the true or false, but the realm of the possible. More precisely, the art of planning involves sorting alternative possibilities in order to specify the more likely ones on which to focus. The key is to determine what the relevant probabilities are and to proceed accordingly.

Our plans often fail because they are ill defined in either purpose or method. More often, they fail because our assumptions about what we can accomplish, the costs of the effort and our ability to bring our project to a successful end are faulty. There is much confusion between what the assumptions are that fashion the environment in which planning takes place and the substance of those plans themselves. We should be mindful of St. Augustine's view that all time is really present time--the present is present experience, the past is present memory, and the future is present expectation. It is, unfortunately, a reality to which few planners will admit. If our plans succeed, it may be because we have perceived reality accurately or that we have small dreams, not great ones. It may also be because the strength of our vision mobilized the support necessary to achieve our dream, despite the odds.

If a plan is a set of coherent decisions, then it is policy. Successful planning gives rise to policy. A well designed policy--"a definite course or method of action selected from among alternatives and in light of given conditions to guide and determine present and future decisions"--is a plan.

Plans and policies contain the same elements and procedures:

1) Analysis of given conditions

2) Review of alternative courses of action

3) A method by which choice is made

4) Selection of a specific goal or purpose

5) A linking of present and future

6) Arbitrary decisions which condition some choices

7) Flexible parameters which guide us in making other choices

These seem to be eminently reasonable and necessary considerations. The emphasis is on purpose and choice through careful analysis. Their task is not the mere presentation of alternatives but expressions of choice reflecting definite values. A plan, a policy, presents decisions about both ends and means. The task of both is to make ends meet. Both the ends and the means must be mutually reinforcing for the plan, or policy, to work.

Yet, it is precisely the notions of choice and coherent decisions which seem most lacking in planning in higher education. Rather than swift, bold, imaginative and coherently, purposeful action, we are surrounded by unintended consequences, a passion for decision produced by the lowest common denominator of committee acceptance and a refusal to choose or decide despite the urgency to do so. Higher education, like many other complex endeavors, suffers from a plethora of data, constituencies, myths, and procedures.

Policy is shaped, as John Gardner points out, whether or not we give serious thought to it.

> It is determined by economic factors, by popular demand, by national need, by the pressures of the market, by parents and students, and by the moods and fads of the moment. It is determined by the men who set tuition levels, by the men who formulate admissions policies, by alumni who want a better football team, by psychologists who devise entrance examinations, by employers who demand certain kinds of training, by professional associations seeking to advance their fields, by givers of money, by pressure groups.[1]

Two critical needs emerge from this assessment. First, someone must orchestrate these competing factors. Second, and more importantly, we need to establish and agree upon the purposes of the endeavor so that values that are central to both the activity and its goal are both known and generally agreed upon. We rarely seem to have a clear sense of direction.

We seem to have been singularly lacking in having an image of the future in higher education. We have overbuilt on many campuses, produced a surfeit of Ph.D.s, many of whom will always be "underemployed," taught people the right things for the wrong reasons (go to college so you can get a better job and earn more money), created huge bureaucracies to administer a mammoth educational system, changed curricular emphases as rapidly as the seasons--all without really knowing why and to what end.

It was not as the result of any careful analysis of societal needs or an assessment of the most efficient or effective use of our resources, natural and human, that we undertook to build and strengthen American higher education. It was largely due to external politics and internal fears engendered by the launching of Sputnik in October, 1957. We, in higher education, did not, as a leading sector of society, appear in the vanguard of the movement for open access and lesser cost for the minorities, the impoverished, the deserving but lower class students. The

Supreme Court and ten years of Civil Rights agitation and legislation finally forced us to accommodate those sectors of society not privy to the advantages that higher education could bestow upon them. The massive expansion in graduate school enrollments in nearly all fields was not occassioned solely by a calculation of need and a national commitment to a challenge to make the world a better place in which to live. It was promoted and fed by a war in Vietnam which we neither desired nor knew how to fight, but which fueled enrollment expansion as well as the casualty lists. We did not consciously set out to cheapen and weaken the value and utility of a college degree. But sheer magnitude helped insure lower standards. Now, many college textbooks are written on a ninth grade reading level to enable college freshmen to understand them--a condition exactly opposite from that which we might hope to exist.

As if things weren't bad enough collectively, the picture may be even more dismal individually. Rising costs, sagging enrollments, increased reporting requirements to both state and federal agencies, creeping vocationalism, and increasing competition face all of us. Private schools in particular, but with an increasing number of public institutions joining them daily, have suffered from the effects of these combined forces. Did individual Presidents or Deans wish these circumstances upon themselves? No! But neither did most of them act to prevent these conditions or insure that they could cope with them more effectively.

Our circumstance is not unlike Alice and the Cheshire Cat in Alice and Wonderland:

> "Cheshire-Puss," she began rather timidly..."Would you tell me, please, which way I ought to go from here?"

> "That depends a good deal on where you want to get to," said the Cat. "I don't much care where------" said Alice. "Then it doesn't matter which way you go," said the Cat.[2]

The purpose of a plan is to answer "Where do I want to go from here?"

There is, however, an equally important question which must not be overlooked--"Where am I?" Unless we ask both questions and seek answers to them, we cannot plan effectively. A plan connects two points--where we are and where we are going. The path we take ought to be our plan, our route. While circumstances can change and chance can be whimsical, I would submit that equally as often, our plans go awry because we haven't defined them well at the outset. We know neither where we are nor where we are going. Having answered these questions--decisively--we may proceed to the creation of a diagram or design," a road map which indicates the leader's destination, describes the best route to that destination, and traces out alternative paths if the main route should be blocked."[3]

What we pass off to each other as planning is, in reality, the absence of planning, a lack of purpose and design rather than the implementation of them.

REASONS FOR NOT PLANNING

There are many reasons for not planning, for not specifying choices, weighing them and deciding on a particular course of action. Usually, we tend to do what is familiar rather than what is necessary, to focus on what is urgent instead of what is important, to operate in the world as we see it rather than in the world as it really is. We skip over the gaps in our intelligence, reinforce our ignorance and rely on the inertia of past and

present to carry us through the future. In short, we don't plan. That is, we don't plan as we should.

Even those dedicated to the task of trying to mold the future would admit the reality of Ambrose Bierce's definition from the Devil's Dictionary: To plan is to bother about the best method of accomplishing an accidental result. We spend hours attempting to analyze complex systems, constructing mathematical models, quantifying the unquantifiable and accepting statistics as judgments. What we reluctantly admit that we can't predict, we chalk up to serendipity. Implicitly, at least, we consider the odds to be in our favor. Such is obviously not an intelligent way to attempt to fashion the future.

Planning is difficult. It requires careful analysis, critical inquiry, and sound judgment. It is time-consuming, arduous and complicated. And, in the final analysis, it is often lonely. Despite our many myths about participatory democracy and the benefits of supposedly collective, spontaneous decisions, they are rare. Some one person generally decides to initiate or refrain from a particular course of action.

Another impediment to planning is the lack of certainty. We are not bold and venturesome. Without a guarantee, we are reluctant to act. We are deterred from deciding anything on the basis that we may be wrong. And, as all in academe learn at an early age, to be wrong is horrible. We may allow the choice to be made by our inaction just as easily as by our action. We may say safely--it was done to us, we didn't do anything--and smugly--who can turn the tide of social forces, economic pressures and political whims?--overtaken by events. That is both easy and passive.

Most importantly, however, higher education lacks a pervasive and persuasive sense of purpose. It lacks an axiological basis, a value framework in which to operationalize its mission, a specific and explicit agreement on not only what we are about but why it is worthy. Perhaps we never will return to a world in which a classical view of man is supported by the Trivium or Quadrivium or a Renaissance view supported by a Liberal education. If both man and his view of himself are changing so much, perhaps all we can have is a pluralistic system which reflects a materialist/behaviorist image. But whatever our image is or isn't, whatever the values which we support and which sustain us--religious and secular--we should be explicit in proclaiming them as a basis for our vision, our action, and our choice.

An equally alarming and more public issue is related to the crisis of value. This is concern for efficiency. We have trouble steering between the Scylla of costs and the Charybdis of outcomes. An absence of clear values makes it even more acute. As Howard Bowen describes:

> A good plan will avoid two frequent errors. The first, common to legislatures and economy minded critics, is to judge efficiency only in relation to cost on the assumption that any change in procedure which costs less, regardless of its effect on outcomes, is efficient. The second error, common to the proponents of higher education, is to judge efficiency only in relation to outcomes on the assumption that any change in procedure which improves outcomes, regardless of cost, is desirable. Both of these approaches fail to recognize that efficiency is a relationship between two variables, cost and outcome, and cannot be measured by either one alone.[4]

The problem, however, is to discriminate among alternatives that may promote either lower costs, improved outcomes or both. Which alternative is better and why? What do questions about cost and outcome suggest about our purpose? These are the hard questions that have less to do with measurement than with values that are not quantifiable.

Still another reason for not planning is the problem of effectiveness. Assessing a plan's effectiveness is a complicated evaluation process. Here, too, is another facet of the question of values. One can be efficient without being effective. The distinction is important. To be efficient is to do things right; to be effective is to do the right things. It is the latter that is the more difficult task and the one which is more important.[5] And, it is this matter of effectiveness that higher education has failed to confront with the same fervor and zeal that has characterized our concern for efficiency. There are a multitude of handbooks, studies, and reports which attempt to help us assess our efficiency, to aid us in the process of accountability. There are few, however, which help us ask the right questions, seek to provide the right answers and which concern themselves with the central purpose of our endeavor--education--and our effectiveness in accomplishing it.

Yet another obstacle to good planning lies in the constant review and assessment that planning entails. Once a plan is made, it should be subjected to periodic review and scrutiny. Planning assumptions may change, conditions vary, the pace of activity increases or decreases, some instrumental goals may be attained and others not. We may err in two ways. We may ignore all the work that went into stating the planning assumptions and goals, throw the baby out with the bath water, and start over. Or, having acted as if a given future will emerge, we may have a mental investment and emotional attachment to the particulars of the plan. We are reluctant to alter it. Problems of stress, dimensionality, novelty, foreshortened perspective and a poverty of expectations may all emerge to complicate the matter further.

While the central purpose of the planning process is to decide, to establish a course of action to realize a goal, this effort promotes indecision. We seem to have not enough information or too much, to be projecting too far ahead or not at all, to have too many questions without answers or too many answers without questions. The collection of data, the concern for consequences, the difficulty in defining both the process and the purpose of the undertaking--all combine to promote indecision.

THE PLIGHT OF ACADEME

Higher Education in the United States finds itself confronted with a host of problems. They vie for our attention and demand solutions. Their severity seems enormous, their implications boundless. Debates over inflation, affirmative action policies, enrollment projections and tenure quotas, credit hour production and other criteria of efficiency, accountability, unionization, the effect of a steady state and others all seem rather strange. Yet, the current plight of American post-secondary education, while severe, is not novel. The times we face are no more difficult, the travail no greater than that faced before.

The beginnings of higher education in this country and the founding of many of the institutions were accomplished under the most difficult of circumstances. Harvard College suffered from a chronic lack of funds, underpaid transient tutors and averaged only eight graduates a year for nearly seventy-five years. President Francis Wayland of Brown University complained in 1850 that the only significance of the bachelor's degree was:

> ...a residence of four years and the payment of college bills. ...we have produced an article for which the demand is diminishing. We sell it at less than cost, and the deficiency is made up by charity. We give it away and still the demand diminishes."[6]

Oberlin College became one of the first American colleges or universities to admit both blacks and women well before the Civil War. Such action was less than popular and frought with unknown consequences. William Rainey Harper wondered on the night before registration whether a single student would enroll at the University of Chicago despite the monumental effort expended to create the school.[7] There was no guarantee that the institution founded by Johns Hopkins in 1876 would be necessary or fulfill a valid need in the hierarchy of American education. Eugene Wilson, Dean of Admissions at Amherst, supposedly remarked in the late 1930s that freshmen were selected on the basis of "a warm body and a good check."[8] Thomas Jefferson, Ezra Cornell, and numerous others faced seemingly insurmountable problems in establishing educational institutions. But, they were men of vision who pursued their goals despite the obstacles.

In a recent Point of View commentary in The Chronicle of Higher Education, Frank Keegan reminds us of the rather extraordinary accomplishments of Robert M. Hutchins at the University of Chicago and the fact that "budget cutting can mean education building."

> He was urged to make "across the board" cuts, but chose rather to make judgements about educational quality. Hutchins overhauled the university's structure by reducing 54 departments to 22, reformed the undergraduate college, and still managed to impress businessmen and donors with his charm. During the Depression years, he raised $52 million in nine years.[9]

The world may not produce another Robert Hutchins, but the example is there for us to attempt to emulate.

Yet, most colleges and universities have little or no idea of exactly what their goals and purposes are or why they subscribe to them. Furthermore, there is little understanding among those supposedly committed to them of how to operationalize these goals. If, and it may not be in the too distant future, someone attempts to apply "Truth in Packaging" legislation to college and university catalogs, we may transfer the whole problem to the already overburdened prison system. We have no sense of mission, no transcendent purpose, no plan. We are timid, hesitant and equivocating. As Frank Keegan has remarked, "If college presidents and professors have some new vision of education, they have managed successfully to keep it to themselves.[10]

If we consider ourselves educated, then we must, as Socrates suggested, seek to master circumstances rather than be mastered by them. If colleges and universities in this country contain some of the greatest minds, such a high level of expertise, an incredible amount of human capital, then why can't they be mobilized on their own behalf? Higher education should be an example to the rest of society of the best way to plan. It obviously is not. Why? Why not? Anyone can be overtaken by events. The trick is to ascertain the relevant probabilities, assert one's will and pursue one's goal accordingly.

THE COSTS OF NOT PLANNING

The costs of not planning adequately in today's environment are appallingly high. Many worthy individuals and institutions are to be sacrificed on the altar of retrenchment. Having experienced the phenomenon of education as the growth industry of the 1960s, we find it

difficult to think that the limits to growth argument applies as swiftly and completely to higher education. Outright survival is the main problem for a great many institutions, departments, majors and professors. Survival is a fact of life which academe is slowly coming to accept. Frederick Rudolph, in the Epilogue to his American College and University, A History, published in 1962, commented that "American institutions of higher learning experienced prosperity and called it a problem of numbers alone; it was also a matter of purpose.[11] We have put ourselves, as individuals and institutions, in this dilemma of not knowing our goal but hurrying to get there, by not asking the right questions, by not having a sense of direction and purpose.

Much of today's rhetoric about higher education seems to be thinly veiled Social Darwinism applying the theory of "survival of the fittest" to institutions of higher learning. The analogy is not totally unfounded. Yet, the Social Darwinian metaphors are too simple and dangerous. Who is to be adjudged fit? Why? Who does the judging? Is magnitude alone to be the criterion? If it is, do we assess magnitude on the basis of endowment, annual budget, enrollment, volumes in the library, acreage or what? If quality, not quantity is to be the test, what standards of quality are to be established and by whom? Do we assess quality by SAT scores of entering students, GRE scores of existing students, percentage of Ph.D.s from leading institutions, number of publications by the faculty, or appropriations, gifts and grants received in the last fiscal year? Furthermore, is natural selection really at work? Higher education is no more a free market enterprise than most others, despite our lip service to the term. Legislatures in their folly and wisdom select and determine who may survive in both the public and private sector.

Most important is the notion that those institutions who are financially able to survive, will survive. The implication is that they are also somehow morally worthy of surviving. Financially fittest equals best, if you will. If applied to food, we could, I suppose, say that since MacDonald's is the most financially successful restaurant chain, it obviously has the best food. This is patently untrue. To admit this, even implicitly, is to abdicate our true role as educators and refuse to apply critical inquiry or assert values.

To have allowed unquestioned and, in many cases, uncontrolled growth in higher education was unwise. We now must pay the price. We are confronted with rising costs that may more than double in ten years, a declining college age enrollment pool, a declining number of jobs which will require a college degree, criticism and questioning of the value of a college degree.[12] In order to retrench, to plan, to deal with these circumstances, we must know not only where we are but where we are going. We must be able to plan effectively.

In a penetrating article entitled "Undergraduate Education for Tomorrow," Joseph Kauffman accurately portrayed the current state of a "future shocked" higher education community.

> Yet--as we see social priorities change, as we see the shriveling of the spirit of higher learning, as we see the various elements in our institutions organize for their own protection--I, at least, perceive a new uncertainty about what we are supposed to do. We'be become brilliantly skillful in coping and managing, controlling and regulating the means. But we're less and less sure we know what are the ends--the purposes and goals of the enterprise. We know <u>how</u> to do it--we're no longer sure <u>what</u> to do![13]

His most damning indictment relate to the necessity for planning and the problem of misplaced priorities.

> In thinking of the future, I must insist that the conception that humankind has of itself is not what it is today--*it is what we think we can become*. And we have nearly lost the art and will of trying to convey to our children and to one another, what it is we dare to become, what it is we cherish, what inspires us, what we hold dear. My great fear is that we will not be called to account for what higher education *ought to become*. For it has been my own personal experience that while I have been asked innumerable times about space utilization, salaries, numbers of employees, regulations concerning discipline, administrative costs and other budget details, in my years as a college and university administrator, I was never asked how *learning* was going! I was never asked about the intellectual or human development of students or faculty.[14]

We would like to think that we are educating people to act and react intelligently in complex and rapidly changing environment. We would like to think that we are helping individuals to develop some of their God-given talents to the fullest, helping them become the best human being that they are capable of becoming, teaching them to act responsibly in society, endowing them with critical inquiry, teaching them to analyze and choose among competing alternatives. But if higher education itself is not demonstrating these qualities, what makes us think that we are instilling them in the students that we serve? Might it not be helpful to practice some of what we teach, or think we teach? Ought we not demonstrate that which we demand of others? If we deem ourselves educated, shouldn't we set out to master our circumstances?

CONCLUSION

There is a great opportunity for those who have a set of convictions, a sense of risk, and the courage to state their values and resolutely pursue them. This no-growth era, steady state or depression does not have to sound the death knell of the diversity of American higher education.

It can be, if we plan to make it be, the beginning of a Renaissance, a new era in postsecondary education. As the Bowen-Minter report suggests, higher education may be leaner but it can be stronger.[15] We must focus our attention less on how we are coping with the various forms of adversity with which we are afflicted and direct it towards whe we think the endeavor worthy.

We should be explicit in our value statements, willing to make normative assessments and argue them among ourselves. We should state our convictions about what ought to happen, defend them, then set about realizing them.

We ought to state what is worth knowing and why. We ought to state what is worth doing and how we intend to set about accomplishing it. We ought to forge the future by design rather than by default. We must analyze our current circumstances and future prospects and make explicit choices. It is equally as fallacious to view the contingent as inevitable and the inevitable as merely contingent. We must attempt to weigh contingencies and exercise both will and resources to effect a preferred outcome.

The fault of much that passes for planning in higher education is that it repackages the same assumptions in new jargon, models and methods without taking the preliminary steps. We jump to the search for answers without bothering to examine our questions. We must force ourselves and others to continually examine what we are and why. We should define the limits of our capabilities, the boundaries of our activity. We should set about to determine the minimum and maximum extent of our preferences. We must sort out the alternative directions we may take to accomplish

our goals, eliminate the mutually exclusive and combine the mutually reinforcing. We must have the courage to meld what ought to be and what is to the best of our ability. If we can state our intentions specifically and delineate the alternative routes to accomplish our purpose, we are then ready to choose.

The major failure in many planning endeavors, however, is a reluctance to make hard choices. Rather than choose a specific course of action or at least list priorities, we are wont to combine all the alternatives in a meaningless melange. What passes for prophetic vision is either overly general or merely so much verbal macrame. The fundamental tasks of determining who we are, where we are, where we should be headed and why, are difficult to accomplish. We are reluctant to ask the right questions because we fear we will be incapable of providing the right answers. The failure is less one of technique than of courage, purpose and choice.

NOTES

[1]John W. Gardner, No Easy Victories, New York: Harper & Row, 1968, p. 69.

[2]Lewis Carroll (pseudonym for Charles Dodgson), Alice's Adventures in Wonderland, New York, Random House, 1946, pp. 73-74.

[3]Howard R. Bowen, "Humanistic Academic Planning" Presented at "Academic Planning for the Eighties and Nineties," January 23-26, 1976, University of Southern California, Office of Institutional Studies, Los Angeles, California, 90007, p. 7.

[4]Ibid.

[5]Peter F. Drucker, The Effective Executive, New York: Harper & Row, 1967, pp. 1-2.

[6]Fred M. and Grace Hechinger, Growing Up in America, New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1975, p. 284.

[7]Ibid., p. 313.

[8]Ibid., p. 284.

[9]Frank L. Keegan, "It's Time to Reread Robert M. Hutchins," The Chronicle of Higher Education, April 26, 1976, p. 40.

[10]Ibid.

[11]Frederick Rudolph, The American College and University, A History, New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1967, p. 485.

[12]See Newsweek, April 26, 1976, Cover Story, "Who Needs College?"

[13]Joseph Kauffman, "Undergraduate Education for Tomorrow," Liberal Education, December, 1974, p. 419.

[14]Ibid., pp. 426-427.

[15]Howard R. Bowen and W. John Minter, Private Higher Education, First Annual Report on Financial and Educational Trends in the Private Sector of American Higher Education, 1975, Association of American Colleges, November.